

Qatar archers bag three golds, Ashraf triumphs in karate as hosts extend lead at GCC Games

The home athletes also won three silver and four bronze medals on penultimate day of the regional multi-sporting extravaganza, taking Qatar's tally to 133 including 48 gold, 49 silver and 36 bronze.

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Reem Al-Saei secured two gold medals as Qatar archers completed a three-gold haul, while Yaman Ashraf triumphed in karate, with the hosts extending their lead at the GCC Games Doha 2026 standings yesterday.

The home athletes also won three silver and four bronze medals on penultimate day of the regional multi-sporting extravaganza, taking Qatar's tally to 133 including 48 gold, 49 silver and 36 bronze.

The hosts are now well ahead of second-placed Saudi Arabia, who have claimed 32 gold, 27 silver and 22 bronze medals. Bahrain are third with 24 gold, 22 silver and 16 bronze.

At Lusail Shooting Range, archers Hamad Al Yafei and Aisha Al Saei displayed a clinical performance to win the compound mixed team event. UAE's Jumana Al Najjar and Shehab Al Saadi secured silver, while Kuwait's Hanan Al Mayas and Abdullah Mal Allah settled for bronze.

The Qatar archers also impressed in the recurve mixed team event as Ahmed Al-Sada and Reem Al-Saei topped the competition ahead of Saudi Arabia and UAE opponents.

Star archer Reem Al-Saei won her second gold of the day when she claimed victory in the women's recurve individual event, with Saudi Arabia's Safana Al Ahmadi and Hessa Al Saree securing silver and bronze medals respectively.

In addition to the three golds, archers also notched up three bronze medals yesterday, with Aisha Al Saei finishing behind gold medallist Amna Al Awadhi and UAE's Jumana Al Najjar in women's compound individual event.

The second bronze medal came from Abdulaziz Al Abbadi, Hamad Al Yafei and Omar Laram, who finished behind Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the men's compound team event.

Reem Al Saei teamed up with Maha Abdulhai and Haya Al Hajri to claim her third medal of the day as Qatar finished third in the women's recurve event, with Saudi Arabia grabbing gold and the UAE taking silver.

Ashraf shines at Aspire Dome

The Qatar karate team also delivered outstanding performances at the Aspire Dome, with Ashraf securing gold in the U-67kg category.

He defeated Saudi Arabia's Saad Al Saif 10-9 in the final. UAE's Rashid Al Suraidi and Kuwait's Mohammed Al Otaibi took bronze medals.

The home karatekas also won three silver medals and one bronze yesterday.

In the U-60kg, Mustafa Abdulrahman claimed silver for Qatar, with Kuwait's Ali Al Ajmi taking gold.

The bronze medals were shared by Saudi Arabia's Ali Al Aryani and the UAE's Ibrahim Bakhit.

Qatar's Abdullah Rashid added another silver in the U-84kg category, where Saudi Arabia's Ahmed Al Malki topped the podium.

The UAE's Ali Al Ali and Kuwait's Mohammed Hassan secured the bronze medals.

In the over-84kg category, Khalid Samir delivered another silver for Qatar as Saudi Arabia's Anas Al Zahrani won gold, while the UAE's Saif Al Qaidi and Kuwait's Mohammed Al Majadi took bronze.

In the under-75kg division, Qatar's Youssef Riyadh earned bronze alongside the UAE's Ali Youssef. Kuwait's Omar Al Janai claimed gold, with Saudi Arabia's Ali Mejari finishing with silver.

The final day of the Games will see Qatar take on Saudi Arabia in their last handball match.




Qatar's medal-winning archers and officials pose for a photo.


Qatar archers won three gold and as many bronze medals yesterday.


Qatar's Yaman Ashraf celebrates after winning karate gold in under-67kg category.

Hussain bags Silver Tour win as Alqaqaa tops Amateur class at Hathab finale

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Bahrain's Hussain Mohamed Dadalla delivered an impressive performance to top Silver Tour, while Alqaqaa bin Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani won Amateur class during the 14th and final round of the Longines Hathab – Qatar Equestrian Tour at the indoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF).

The series is organised by the QEF in partnership with Al Shaqab, a member of Qatar Foundation.

In the Silver Tour competition, held under Table A rules with one round against the clock over 130cm fences, Hussain guided Elite to victory with a flawless round in 54.56 seconds. Saudi rider Khaled Al Hadi finished second aboard Doremi du Flot Z in 55.50secs, while Qatar's Faris Saad Al Qahtani secured third place on Gaya des Cours in 57.06secs.

In the Amateur class, contested over two phases at 100cm, Alqaqaa rode Bon Suela to victory after producing two clear rounds in 27.24secs. Sultan Abdulaziz Al Sada claimed second place aboard Argelith Squid in 28.34secs, while Iraq's Mariam Abdulkarim Abed and Qatar's Moza Hamza Al Kuwari shared third position after both clocked 28.39secs aboard Jumbo and Haneen respectively.


Alqaqaa bin Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani rode Bon Suela to victory after producing two clear rounds.


Head of Media and Live Broadcasting Committee of Longines Hathab Abdulla Al-Qashouti crowned the Amateur class winners.


Head of Facilities Department at Qatar Equestrian Federation Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Thani presented the medals to Silver Tour winners.

Al Sadd to start pre-season on July 5 before Austria camp

ABDULRAHMAN BACHIR
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Reigning Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd SC will begin preparations for the 2026-27 season in July, including an overseas training camp in Austria as they aim for a trophy-laden campaign.

Qatar's most decorated club secured only the QSL title last season, missing out on the Amir Cup after a final defeat to Al Gharafa and bowing out of the AFC Champions League Elite in the quarter-finals.

The club recently announced an intensive training programme beginning with a week-long camp in Doha on July 5, marking Roberto Mancini's first pre-season in charge of Al Sadd SC. The Italian tactician took over at the club last November.

After a camp in Doha, the Wolves will fly to Austria on July 13. The opening phase of the camp will take place in Lienz from July 13 to 24, before the squad moves to Bad Haring for the second phase running from July 25 until August 7.

Al Sadd are also scheduled to play four friendly matches during the Austria camp on July 17, July 22, July 30 and August 7, before returning to Doha on August 8 to complete build-up for the new domestic campaign. The QSL season will get underway on August 20.

Alongside the club's preparations, several Al Sadd players are also expected to play key roles for Qatar national football team at the June 11-July 19 FIFA World Cup. Six players from the club were included in Qatar's preliminary squad, underlining Al Sadd's strong presence within the national team.

Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham was among those selected, alongside defenders Boualem Khoukhi, Pedro Miguel and Tarek Salman. In attack, star forward Akram Afif and veteran captain Hassan Al-Haydos were also included.

Qatar will begin their World Cup campaign against Switzerland on June 13 in Santa Clara, California, before facing Canada in Vancouver on June 18. Their group stage campaign will conclude against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Inglewood, California on June 24.

Al Ahli part ways with Younes Ali

Al Ahli SC yesterday announced the mutual termination of coach Younes Ali's contract following a challenging 2025-26 season.

The club confirmed the decision after Al Ahli finished ninth in the QSL standings with 26 points from 22 matches.

While league form proved difficult, Al Ahli enjoyed a notable run on the continental stage, reaching the semi-finals of the AFC Champions League Two before losing to Al Nassr. Their Amir Cup campaign ended in the Round of 16 after a defeat to Umm Salal SC in February.

Al Ahli's management thanked Younes for his efforts during his tenure. The coach had taken over midway through the season, replacing Igor Biscan after the opening 10 rounds of the league.

The club also stated that it plans to move forward with a new vision aimed at better aligning the team with its long-term ambitions.


A file photo of Al Sadd players during a training session.

Qatar drawn with Panama, Egypt and Greece for FIFA U-17 World Cup

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Hosts Qatar will launch their FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 campaign in Group A against Panama, Egypt and Greece after the official draw for the global youth showpiece was held in Zurich, Switzerland yesterday.

Qatar is preparing to host the tournament for the second consecutive year, with the 2026 edition taking place from November 19 to December 13 at Aspire Zone and Khalifa International Stadium.

Continuing the expanded 48-team format successfully introduced in 2025, qualified nations were drawn into 12 groups of four, producing a number of compelling matchups for the second of five consecutive editions of the youth tournament that Qatar will host through 2029.

Speaking virtually at the draw, FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 Local Organising Committee CEO Jassim Al Jassim highlighted Qatar's commitment towards delivering another exceptional edition of the prestigious youth tournament.

"Last year, Qatar made history by hosting the first-ever 48-team FIFA tournament, welcoming 1,008 young players. More than 197,000 fans attended 104 matches across eight pitches of the Aspire Zone complex, creating a unique festival atmosphere. A total of 130 scouts from leading clubs also gathered to witness football's next generation up close. We are proud of the platform the 2025 edition provided for rising stars such as Hamza Abdelkarim, Mateus Mide, Anísio Cabral and Samuele Inacio," said Al Jassim.

"This year, we build on everything we learned in 2025 to deliver an even greater experience for players, fans, and the global football community. Congratulations to all qualified teams, we look forward to welcoming you to Doha," he added.

Notable teams returning to Doha include Italy, Brazil, Morocco, Japan and Saudi Arabia, among others.

The 2026 edition also features debutant nations Montenegro, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Vietnam, who are making their first appearance in the tournament.

With 46 of the 48 participating teams already confirmed, the tournament's final line-up will be decided on May 23, when the CAF play-off matches conclude at the U-17 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco. The two remaining berths will be awarded to the winners of the play-offs between Ethiopia vs Mozambique and Uganda vs Ghana.

Matches will be held at the state-of-the-art Competition Complex in Aspire Zone, welcoming fans to enjoy a vibrant football festival-like atmosphere.

The tournament's centralised hosting model proved to a defining feature of the 2025 edition, allowing fans and talent scouts to attend multiple matches a day. The final will take place on December 13 at the Khalifa International Stadium.

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR 2026 GROUPS

Group A: Qatar, Panama, Egypt, Greece
Group B: Republic of Korea, CAF 1, New Caledonia, Ecuador
Group C: Argentina, Australia, CAF 2, Denmark
Group D: France, Haiti, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay
Group E: Italy, Jamaica, Côte d'Ivoire, Uzbekistan
Group F: Senegal, Croatia, Cuba, Tajikistan
Group G: Mali, New Zealand, Belgium, Vietnam
Group H: Spain, China, Fiji, Morocco
Group I: Brazil, Republic of Ireland, Tanzania, Costa Rica
Group J: USA, Montenegro, Chile, Algeria
Group K: Mexico, Romania, Cameroon, Venezuela
Group L: Japan, Colombia, Serbia, Honduras



An official picks Qatar during the draw ceremony.



Ronaldo strikes twice to end long wait for Saudi Pro League title

RIYADH: Cristiano Ronaldo **(pictured)** scored twice as Al Nassr clinched the Saudi Pro League title with a 4-1 win over Damac yesterday, ending his long wait for domestic silverware.

A trademark free-kick and a close-range finish, both in the final half-hour, sealed the win Al Nassr needed on the last night of the season, with Al Hilal finishing just two points behind.

Ronaldo, 41, who was without a major club trophy since winning Serie A with Juventus in 2020, arrived in the oil-rich desert kingdom to great acclaim in 2023, wept as he watched the final minutes from the bench.

He adds the Saudi championship to his English, Spanish and Italian titles and five Champions League medals.

Al Nassr took a 2-0 lead but were back to 2-1 before Ronaldo's free-kick on 63 minutes evaded the goalkeeper and a forest of legs to find the far corner.

He struck again nine minutes from time, receiving a cut-back on the edge of the six-yard box and smashing high into the net.

Next up for the all-time leading men's international goalscorer, with 143 goals, is a sixth crack at the World Cup after he was named in Portugal's squad this week.

Ronaldo was the Pro League's top scorer in his first two seasons, with his career tally now at 973 -- tantalisingly close to the 1,000-goals milestone.

His Saudi stint has not always been smooth. In 2024, he was left in floods of tears when Al Nassr lost the King's Cup final to Al Hilal on penalties, denying him his first Saudi title.

This season, he disappeared from Al Nassr's line-up for three games in an apparent protest at Benzema's transfer to rival team Al Hilal.

Ronaldo's only silverware with Al Nassr was the 2023 Arab Club Champions Cup.

He was also disappointed on Saturday, when Al Nassr lost to Gamba Osaka in the AFC Champions League Two final. — *AFP*

QOC organises Paralympic Challenge Day 2026

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) organised the 2026 Paralympic Challenge Day for people with disabilities in cooperation with Awsaj Academy, part of Qatar Foundation's Pre University Education, at the academy's sports hall. The event was held on Wednesday in a distinguished sporting and educational atmosphere aimed at promoting the values of challenge and social inclusion.

The program featured a number of recognised Paralympic sports and competitions, including wheelchair basketball, boccia, goalball, and sitting volleyball, in addition to handcycling simulations and blindfold races.

These activities provided students with an opportunity to learn about Paralympic sports while fostering teamwork and positive interaction among participants.

Event Director from the QOC Saeeda Al Abdullah expressed her sincere appreciation to all participants in the program, emphasising that the event's great success was the result of fruitful cooperation with Awsaj Academy and the dedicated efforts made by everyone involved to achieve its sporting and humanitarian objectives.

She said: "At the Qatar Olympic Committee, we look forward to continuing this strategic and constructive cooperation in the future and to launching innovative initiatives that contribute to strengthening social responsibility and community participation, while supporting meaningful activities that serve and inspire younger generations and reinforce the values of determination, challenge, and respect among students."

Awsaj Academy Elementary School Principal Mohammed Al Janahi stressed that organising such purposeful sporting events reflects the importance of promoting the values of inclusion and cooperation, while empowering all students to participate actively within the school community.

He praised the important role played by the QOC in supporting sporting and humanitarian initiatives that contribute to raising awareness of Paralympic sports and promoting a culture of respect and appreciation for the abilities of individuals with different needs.

He added that such community partnerships leave a deep educational and humanitarian impact on students and contribute to building a more aware and socially engaged generation.


The officials pose for a photo with the participating children.





Senegal have 'big dreams' for World Cup

SENEGAL SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Edouard Mendy (Al-Ahly/RSA), Mory Diaw (Le Havre/FRA), Yehvann Diouf (Nice/FRA)
Defenders: Kalidou Koulibaly (Al-Hilal/RSA), Abdoulaye Seck (Maccabi Haifa/ISR), Moussa Niakhate (Lyon/FRA), Ismail Jakobs (Galatasaray/TUR, Mamadou Sarr (Strasbourg/FRA), Antoine Mendy (Nice/FRA), Ilay Camara (Anderlecht/BEL), El Hadji Malick Diouf (West Ham/ENG), Krepin Diatta (Monaco/FRA), Moustapha Mbow (Paris FC/FRA)
Midfielders: Idrissa Gana Gueye (Everton/ENG), Pape Matar Sarr (Tottenham/ENG), Pathe Ciss (Rayo Vallecano/ESP), Pape Gueye (Villarreal/ESP), Lamine Camara (Monaco/FRA), Habib Diarra (Sunderland/ENG), Bara Sapoko Ndiaye (Bayern Munich/GER)
Forwards: Sadio Mane (Al Nassr/RSA), Bamba Dieng (Lorient/FRA), Nicolas Jackson (Bayern Munich/GER), Iliman Ndiaye (Everton/ENG), Ismaïla Sarr (Crystal Palace/ENG), Cherif Ndiaye (Samsunspor/TUR), Cheikh Sabaly (Metz/FRA), Ibrahima Mbaye (Paris SG/FRA), Assane Diao (Como/ITA)

DAKAR: Senegal have "big dreams" to "achieve great things" at the 2026 World Cup, coach Pape Thiaw said yesterday as he unveiled an expanded 28-man squad for next month's tournament.

Key players include Sadio Mane, Idrissa Gana Gueye, Edouard Mendy and captain Kalidou Koulibaly, who has been sidelined since April 8 with a thigh injury.

Emerging stars Monaco's Lamine Camara, PSG forward Ibrahima Mbaye and Bayern Munich midfielder Bara Sapoko Ndiaye have also been included with striker Bamba Dieng, rewarded for his impressive end to the season with French club Lorient.

"It's a balanced and well thought out group to meet the demands of this World Cup, which is an intense competition," former Senegal international Thiaw told a press conference.


Senegal's coach Pape Thiaw speaks during the unveiling of Senegal's 2026 FIFA World Cup squad in Dakar yesterday.

The Lions of Teranga will begin their campaign on June 16 against Kylian Mbappe's France in New Jersey. Group I also includes Norway and Iraq.

The two teams previously met in the opening match of the 2002 World Cup, their only encounter, which Senegal won and went on to reach the quarter-finals. "Senegal have three opponents. Why focus on France?" he added.

"Norway and Iraq are there. We have a historical connection with France. But for me, it's not a special match."

Senegal had a turbulent start to the year when they won the Africa Cup of Nations final in January, a victory later awarded on appeal in March to opponents and tournament hosts Morocco.

> *It's a balanced and well thought out group to meet the demands of this World Cup, which is an intense competition.*
> ***Pape Thiaw***
> ***Senegal coach***

CAF cited regulations about leaving the field: during the match Senegalese players, coach Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Morocco were awarded an added-time penalty, which forward Brahim Diaz ultimately missed.

The Senegalese Football Federation has appealed CAF's decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). — *AFP*

Neuer recalled to aid Germany World Cup bid

FRANKFURT: Veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer **(pictured)** was handed a surprise recall to Germany's 26-man World Cup squad yesterday, coming out of international retirement to play in the tournament for a fifth time.

The 40-year-old retired from international duty in 2024 but coach Julian Nagelsmann confirmed the World Cup winner will be the number one option ahead of Oliver Baumann at this summer's tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico. "Everyone knows the aura and quality Manu has, what he brings to a team," Nagelsmann said at a squad announcement in Frankfurt. "We're planning with him as our number one." Joshua Kimmich will retain the captaincy despite the long-time skipper's return.

Former Manchester City and Bayern winger Leroy Sane, now at Galatasaray, has retained his spot. Bayern Munich's Neuer is the only remaining member of the squad that won the World Cup in 2014. Matthias Ginter, another 2014 World Cup winner who was instrumental in Freiburg's run to the Europa League final, failed to make the cut, with Newcastle's Malick Thiaw preferred in central defence.

Bayern goalkeeper Jonas Urbig was dropped from the squad after being called up for the March friendlies, but will travel with the side to help in training during the tournament.

Munich's Jamal Musiala returns to the squad after missing Germany's March friendlies as he recovered from a broken ankle. Nagelsmann named a Premier League-heavy attacking contingent, which includes freshly minted English Premier League champion Kai Havertz of Arsenal, Liverpool's Florian Wirtz and Newcastle's Nick Woltemade.

Bayern youngster Lennart Karl, 18, was also called up to a major tournament for the first time.

As expected, Bayern forward Serge Gnabry misses out with a thigh injury, as does Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen. Recent regulars Niclas Fuellkrug and Robert Andrich were not called up.

Neuer was the standout player as Germany won their fourth World Cup in 2014, but since then the team's form has plummeted.

Germany crashed out at the World Cup group stage in 2018 for the first time since 1938 and repeated the feat four years later in Qatar.

Since making the semi-finals of Euro 2016, Germany have won just one knockout game in the tournament -- a 2-0 success against Denmark on home soil at Euro 2024. Neuer has impressed this season for Bayern, winning man-of-the-match honours in the quarter-final victory over Real Madrid, but comes into the tournament under an injury cloud due to a recurring calf complaint.

He is in doubt for Saturday's German Cup final against Stuttgart in Berlin.

The Germans will have one final match on home soil, against Finland on May 31, before facing World Cup co-hosts the United States in Chicago on June 6. — *AFP*

Iran to play Mali in second pre-World Cup friendly in Turkiye

TEHRAN: Iran will play Mali in a friendly match after a game against Gambia in Turkiye, where it is holding its pre-World Cup training camp, the federation said.

"Iran's national football team will face Mali on June 4 in its second friendly match of the Antalya training camp in Turkiye," the federation said in a statement carried by IRNA state news agency yesterday. Iran's football team arrived in Turkiye on Monday for their training camp and to complete visa applications ahead of the World Cup.

The team will play a friendly against Gambia on May 29, according to the federation. Both of Iran's opponents are ranked well below them in the FIFA rankings -- Iran are 21st, Mali 52nd and Gambia 116th. — *AFP*

Alex Marquez out of Italy, Hungary MotoGP races after crash

MADRID: Spanish rider Alex Marquez will be sidelined for at least the next two MotoGP races after suffering two fractures in a horror crash at the Catalan Grand Prix last weekend, his Gresini Racing team said yesterday.

"Alex Marquez will miss the Mugello and Balaton Grands Prix," Gresini said on social media, alongside a photo of the rider with his right arm in a sling and wearing a neck brace.

Marquez fractured a vertebra and his right collarbone in Catalonia after flipping off his bike, which was totally destroyed after a collision with a wall.

While battling with Pedro Acosta for the race lead, Marquez ran into the back of his compatriot, who experienced a technical problem and suddenly slowed down.

Marquez could return in the Czech Republic, for the Grand Prix from June 19-21, depending on his recovery. His older brother and reigning MotoGP champion Marc Marquez is also currently out injured and likely to miss the Italian Grand Prix. — *AFP*



Al Sadd beat Al Arabi to win Amir Cup Table Tennis Championship title

Al Sadd SC were crowned champions of the prestigious Amir Cup Table Tennis Championship for the 2025-2026 season after defeating Al Arabi SC 3-2 in a thrilling final yesterday. Following the closely fought title clash, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain presented the trophies and medals to the winners.

Clinical Gujarat end Chennai IPL hopes with 89-run win

AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Titans beat Chennai Super Kings by 89 runs with a clinical all round performance in Ahmedabad yesterday.

The top three piled on the runs to lead Gujarat to 229 for the loss of four wickets. Then pacer Mohammed Siraj took three wickets in the first three overs of the Chennai chase, ensuring the visitors never had the momentum as they were bowled out for 140 in the 14th over.

Gujarat's easy win took them to the second in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and eliminated Chennai from playoff contention.

Chennai skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad won the toss and decided to field, but Gujarat openers skipper Shubman Gill and Sai Sudharsan looked comfortable.

Gill, who hit 37-ball 64 with seven fours and three sixes, and Sai, who made a 53-ball 84 with four sixes and seven fours, shared a 125-run opening partnership. The duo raced to 100 in the tenth over, with Gill taking the early initiative.

After Gill fell to Australia's Spencer Johnson, England's Jos Buttler took charge with an agressive and unbeaten 27-ball 57.

Most Chennai bowlers looked ordinary and leaked runs as Gujarat finished at 229-4.

Chennai's batters never got going. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada finished with figures of 3-32 in 3.4 overs. In-form Siraj took 3-26 in his four overs.

Shivam Dube was the only Chennai batter who put up some resistance. He hit a 17-ball 47 before he fell to Afghanistan's Rashid Khan.

Khan finished with 3-18 in his two overs. — *AFP*

Sinner, Djokovic kept apart in French Open draw

PARIS: Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic will not be able to meet until the French Open final after the pair were placed in opposite halves of the men's draw yesterday, while Coco Gauff could face Aryna Sabalenka in the women's semis.

Sinner, the red-hot men's title favourite in the absence of injured rival Carlos Alcaraz, will start his bid for a maiden Roland Garros crown against French wildcard Clement Tabur, the world number 165.

Women's world number one Sabalenka faces a tough potential road to the final, with Naomi Osaka, Victoria Mboko and reigning champion Gauff all potential hurdles for the Belarusian.

The build-up to the event, which gets under way on Sunday, has been overshadowed by threats from players to boycott some of their media duties over a pay dispute with Grand Slam tournament organisers.

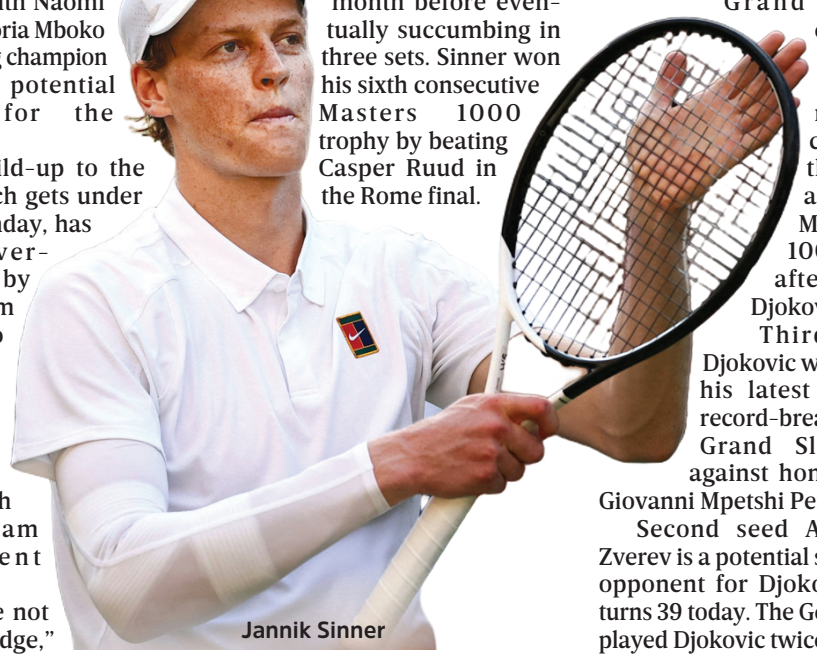
"We are not going to budge," tournament director Amelie Mauresmo told reporters at the draw in Paris, adding she was a "little saddened" by the situation.

"We have prize money that has (...) doubled in 10 years, and has also increased significantly recently."

World number one Sinner is slated to meet big-hitting American fifth seed Ben Shelton in the quarter-finals.

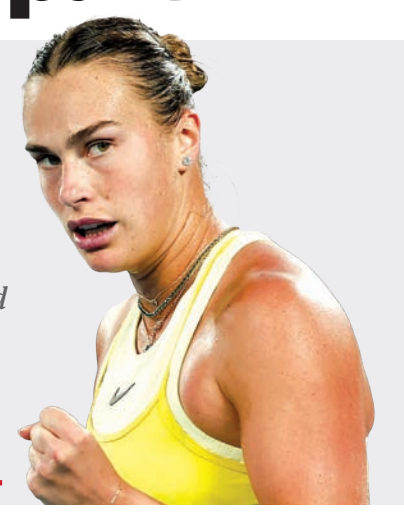
Daniil Medvedev is a possible semi-final opponent for the Italian.

The Russian gave Sinner a rare scare in the Italian Open semis earlier this month before eventually succumbing in three sets. Sinner won his sixth consecutive Masters 1000 trophy by beating Casper Ruud in the Rome final.



Jannik Sinner

Women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka faces a tough potential road to the final, with Naomi Osaka, Victoria Mboko and reigning champion Gauff all potential hurdles for the Belarusian.



That made the four-time Grand Slam champion only the second man to complete the set of all nine Masters 1000 titles, after Novak Djokovic.

Third seed Djokovic will kick off his latest tilt at a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title against home player Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard.

Second seed Alexander Zverev is a potential semi-final opponent for Djokovic, who turns 39 today. The German has played Djokovic twice before at Roland Garros, suffering quarter-final defeats against the Serb in 2019 and last year.

Djokovic is hoping to finally break out of his tie with Margaret Court on 24 Slam titles with a first major triumph since the 2023 US Open.

Zverev, still without a Grand Slam trophy after several near misses, plays Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in round one.

The stand-out first-round tie sees in-form French number one Arthur Fils take on 41-year-old former champion Stan Wawrinka, featuring at the tournament for the last time before retirement.

Home favourite Gael Monfils, a semi-finalist in 2008, starts his farewell French Open against fellow countryman Hugo Gaston.

Sabalenka v Osaka possible last-16 tie

American fourth seed Gauff, who beat world number one Sabalenka in a tense final 12 months ago, will start her title defence against compatriot Taylor Townsend.

Sabalenka, who has never won the Roland Garros tournament, was handed a difficult draw.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka is a potential last-16 opponent for Sabalenka, although the Japanese star has never previously reached the second week in Paris.

Rising Canadian prospect Mboko or fifth seed Jessica Pegula could await the Belarusian in the quarters.

Sabalenka will take on Jessica Bouzas Maneiro of Spain in the first round.

Gauff may need to get past fellow American Amanda Anisimova, who lost the Wimbledon and US Open finals last year, in the last eight. Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek, seeded third, could meet Italian Open winner Elina Svitolina in the quarters.

Second seed Elena Rybakina, who won the year's opening Grand Slam event at the Australian Open, is slated to face Swiatek in the semi-finals.

Poland's Swiatek will start her campaign against 17-year-old Australian wildcard Emerson Jones, while Rybakina plays Slovenia's Veronika Erjavec.

There is a possible all-Southeast Asian clash in the second round between Indonesia's Janice Tjen and the Philippines' Alexandra Eala.

If that tie materialises, it may be for a last-32 meeting with Osaka. — *AFP*



Novak Djokovic

Canadian GP: Antonelli seeks to extend sensational start with fourth victory

MONTREAL: Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli seeks a sensational fourth consecutive victory to boost his F1 drivers' title bid this weekend, but expects a robust response from Mercedes team-mate George Russell at the Canadian Grand Prix.

The 19-year-old rising star of Italian sport leads the Briton, nine years his senior and the pre-season favourite for the title, by 20 points after four rounds of the 22-race championship as Mercedes unveil a major upgrade package.

For Russell, it is important to re-establish his authority in the team after two fourth-place finishes allowed his team-mate to revel in being the sole Silver Arrows man, astride the top of the podium.

"I am expecting George, for sure, to be super-strong again in Canada," said Antonelli, whose precocious talent, wide smile and curly hair have become an image Italian sporting optimism following their football team's failure to qualifying for the World Cup.

"He's always been strong in Montreal and he won last year so I have to be ready and be fully focused. I will do my best."



Kimi Antonelli arrives in the paddock during previews ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Canada.

In addition to his hat-trick of pole, victory and fastest lap last year, Russell took pole at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in 2024 and will fancy his chances of winning both Saturday's sprint race and Sunday's Grand Prix.

Last year, Antonelli was fourth on the grid and finished third, his first podium finish.

This time, he hopes to be the first Italian since Alberto Ascari in 1952 to claim four straight wins, when he reeled off six.

Mercedes' team chief Toto Wolff has side-stepped frenzied talk of Antonelli's prospects to concentrate on keeping balanced and cool.

"Performance is only performance when it is delivered on track," he stressed.

"We are just four races into the season and there is a long year ahead. It is an important race for us, but it does not decide anything. So, we stay balanced, keep learning and execute as well as we can."

Mercedes' challengers hopeful

The championship-leading Silver Arrows men are likely to be challenged by Ferrari, McLaren and Red Bull, with four-time champion Max Verstappen, who took part at the Nurburgring 24-Hours race last weekend, aiming to add to his three previous wins for Red Bull.

World champion Lando Norris won the sprint last year ahead of McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri, but the pair collided in the Grand Prix which ended up finishing behind a safety car.

Lewis Hamilton and his Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc will also be strong contenders despite team boss Fred Vasseur grumbling about rule changes, notably to the starting procedures, that have negated an advantage they enjoyed.

"It was a bit harsh for us," he said of the introduction of a blue light five-second warning to ensure teams spooled up their turbos.

"I understand what they did, for safety grounds, but the other option would have been to ask the others to start from the pit-lane if they think it's not safe."

Lance Stroll will be the only Canadian in the race, but like team-mate Fernando Alonso has little optimism as Aston Martin have struggled for performance with an uncompetitive Honda engine.

Alonso has hinted he is likely to retire from F1 and will decide his future during the summer months of the European leg of the season. — *AFP*



Alec Segaert celebrates as he crosses the finish line.

Belgium's Segaert snatches Giro 12th stage, Eulalio stays in pink

NOVI LIGURE: Alec Segaert won the 12th stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday after a surprise late attack denied the sprinters their chance of a bunch finish, as his teammate Afonso Eulalio again stayed in the overall lead.

Belgian Segaert won his first ever stage on a Grand Tour after making a charge for the line with just over three kilometres remaining in an eventful stage.

The 23-year-old Bahrain Victorious rider prevailed in Novi Ligure in an eventful 175km stage from Imperia which saw key sprint rivals Jonathan Milan and Paul Magnier dropped on the final Bric Berton climb.

Portuguese Eulalio extended his lead over pre-race favourite Jonas Vingegaard to 33 seconds after claiming intermediate sprint points.

In the early part of the stage several attacks pulled away before being clawed back by the peloton, until a six-man group, none contending any of the jerseys on offer, created a gap of two minutes before the Colle Giovo climb.

But Segaert's bold burst late made it perfect day for his team. Today, the peloton will take on a largely flat run between Alessandria and Verbania which features two punchy climbs towards the end of the 189km stage. — *AFP*